

*Cecily.* Uncle Jack seems strangely agitated.

*Chasuble.* Your guardian has a very emotional nature.

*Lady Bracknell.* This noise is extremely unpleasant. It sounds as if he was having an argument. I dislike arguments of any kind. They are always vulgar, and often convincing.

*Chasuble.* [Looking up.] It has stopped now.

[The noise is redoubled.]

*Lady Bracknell.* I wish he would arrive at some conclusion.

*Gwendolen.* This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last.

*Enter Jack with a hand-bag of black leather in his hand.*

*Jack.* [Rttsing over to Miss Prism.] Is this the hand-bag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer.

*Miss Prism.* [Calmly] It seems to be mine. Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of a Gower omnibus in younger and happier days. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage, an incident that occurred at Leamington. And here, on the lock, are my initials. I had forgotten that in an extravagant mood I had had them placed there. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am delighted to have it so unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a great inconvenience being without it all these years.

*Jack.* [In a pathetic voice.] Miss Prism, more is restored to you than this hand-bag. I was the baby you placed in it.

*Miss Prism.* [Amazed.] You?

*Jack.* [Embracing her.] Yes . . . mother!

*Miss Prism.* [Recoiling in indignant astonishment] Mr.

Worthing! I am unmarried!

*Jack.* Unmarried! I do not deny that is a serious blow. But after all, who has the right to cast a stone against one who has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women? Mother, I forgive you. [Tries to embrace her again.]

*Miss Prism.* [Still more indignant] Mr. Worthing, there is some error. [Pointing to Lady Bracknell] There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

*Jack.* [After a pause] Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

*Lady Bracknell.* I am afraid that the news I have to give you will not altogether please you. You are the son of my poor sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and consequently Algernon's elder brother.